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THE
DUTCH TRADING POST
AT TRENTON

THE DUTCH TRADING POST

BY

DR. CARLOS E. GODFREY

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THE TRENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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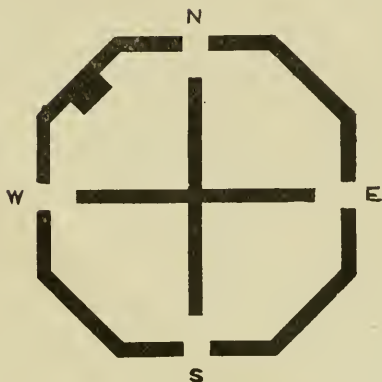
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THE DUTCH TRADING POST.



When the octagon stone walls were unearched in this city by Mr. George Bernard Consolloy in August, 1872, while excavating land for the erection of the four brick buildings now known as numbers 738 to 744 South Warren Street, near the corner of Ferry, there was exposed to view an object possessing rare and unique interests, and which was unknown to persons who had resided within its immediate vicinity for more than ninety years.

In reporting this circumstance to the New Jersey Historical Society on January 16, 1873—with the accompanying illustration, Mr. Charles Megill said, in part¹:

“The size of the building appears to have been about sixty feet in diameter. The foundation walls were composed of hard gray stone laid about two feet thick with mortar, and running six feet deep. The walls had four openings, each opening about three feet wide and facing to the North, South, East and West. On the outside of the walls, facing the Delaware River, there was built up against the same a brick wall about one foot thick and four feet deep, of hard burnt brick. * * * On the northwest corner of the building there was an old stone and brick chimney about six feet wide and six feet deep from the surface of the foundation.”

1. Proc. N. J. Hist. Soc (2d Ser.), Vol. III, p. 60.

To this concrete statement it is fair to add the personal observations of the present Mr. Frank W. Consolloy, of this city, who informed me that when these walls were uncovered there stood within the interior a great transverse wall built of the same material, and the top of the whole laying about two feet below the surface of the ground; that the northern extremity was accidentally exposed in excavating the south line of the property referred to, near thirty feet in the rear of the eastern building line of Warren Street. He also told me that a few cannon balls were found in the ruins, and in one corner there was unearthed a quantity of cooking utensils having the appearance of very thick stoneware made in curious shapes, much of which were broken in fragments.

Since this discovery local and other historians for years have fancied that these walls were the remnant of an old French fort, built to shield the inhabitants from the hostile savages.² Some conceive it to have been a blockhouse to maintain the operation of the ferry across the river;³ or else to protect the iron works in Trenton, located nearly one mile away.⁴ It has been asserted that it was doubtless the storehouse built by William Trent or his successor.⁵ And others have personally expressed the thought that it was probably the kitchen, or the coachhouse and stables, belonging to the Trent estate. It is really absurd to imagine how the inner transverse walls and the great fire place in the basement could serve either of these purposes, to say nothing of the size and odd shape of the outer structure.

The celebrated archaeologist, Dr. Charles Conrad Abbott, without furnishing reasons or authority, alleged that these walls were the remains of an old Dutch trading-post.⁵ This theory was rejected by his opponents in the discussion because the "post" was never indicated upon any map or survey of the past, and who further claimed that the walls were of later construction owing to the fact that two English half-

2. Stryker—Trenton One Hundred Years Ago, p. 21.

W. S. Yard—State Gazette, Apr. 11, 1910, p. 3.

Penna. Mag. of Hist., Vol. XXXV, p. 243.

Nelson—The Iron Industry in Trenton, p. 16.

3. Jos. H. West—Trenton Sunday Advertiser, Mar. 25, 1906, p. 17.

4. Nelson—the Iron Industry in Trenton, p. 16.

Penna. Mag. of Hist., Vol. XXXV, p. 243.

5. C. C. Abbott—Trenton Sunday Advertiser, Mar. 18, 1906, p. 17.

pennies bearing the dates of 1730 and 1732, respectively, were found in the excavation.³ Thus the matter dropped.

When and by whom the walls were built is a question which the skilled archaeologist could readily answer with accuracy from his examination of the brick or mortar used in the construction. The old imported Dutch brick we know was extremely dark in color, resembling the "hard burnt brick" which Mr. Megill said was found in the foundation; the Swedish brick had the colored appearance of amber; and the English brick that of cherry-red. Inasmuch as none of the brick or mortar used in the walls were saved or can now be found, we must resort to history to ascertain when, by whom, and for what purpose these walls were built.

In doing this we must first observe that the octagon construction of buildings was an exclusive characteristic of the early Dutch. This statement cannot ~~cannot~~ be successfully controverted! In Holland today will be found numerous large wind-mills and other structures which were built centuries ago in the octagon and other angular patterns. In this colony we know that the Dutch emigrants built the octagon stone church in 1680 at Bergen, now part of Jersey City, and which is illustrated in the histories of Hudson County.⁶ Mr. Victor H. Paltists of the New York Public Library possesses an original manuscript sketch of an octagon building which was erected by the Dutch at New Utrecht, on Long Island, at an early and unknown date. Nowhere, however, after diligent search, have I been able to find a contemporary description or plan of the Dutch trading-posts built by the West India Company during their regime in America in the seventeenth century.

The Dutch records show that a trading-post was established by the West India Company at Sanhican, now Trenton, shortly before the year 1630,⁷ where the "Arms of their High Mightinesses" were also erected by the Dutch authorities as a token that the river and circumadjacent lands were the sovereign property and under the control of the States-

3. Jos. H. West—Trenton Sunday Advertiser, Mar. 25, 1906, p. 17.

6. Winfield—Hist. of Hudson County, pp. 378, 381.

Van Winkle—Old Bergen, pp. 163, 166.

7. O'Callaghan—Doc. Hist. of N. Y., Vol. 1, p. 50.
Van Rensselaer Bowler MSS., p. 245.

General of Holland.⁸ These records also tell us that this "post" was soon after abandoned,⁹ owing to the financial loss sustained by the Company, induced chiefly through the harsh treatment which it extended to its employes.¹⁰

When the Swedes gained supremacy of the South River, subsequently known as the Delaware River on the English conquest in 1664, both the Swedish and Dutch records show that Governor Printz ordered an armed detachment to go up the river to Sanhican and destroy the "Dutch Arms," which was accomplished on September 8, 1646.¹¹ This act undoubtedly involved the demolition of the trading-post by fire, the superstructure of which was necessarily of wood, to which the coat-of-arms naturally would be attached.

The destruction of the trading-post in 1646 is the reason why that it was not delineated upon the map of the upper Delaware by Lindstrom in 1650, by Van der Donck in 1655, or on Pocock's map of 1679, Basse's survey of the Stacy tract for William Trent in 1714, or upon any other later maps or surveys; and, this is also the reason why numerous travelers in passing through Trenton, beginning with Danekerts in 1679 and continuing down by others to the year 1800, make no mention in their diaries of this large, strange, octagon building, *because it ceased to exist*.

The only forts authorized by law to be erected in the Colony of New Jersey were first built in 1755, to repel the incursions of the Indians along the upper Delaware above the point what is now known as Phillipsburg. My examination of the original correspondence of Governor Bernard of New Jersey in the library of Harvard University show that these forts were built of green logs, about ten by twenty feet in size, and which extended a few miles a part up to the New York boundary. New Jersey never built any fort comparing with the size or shape of the octagon structure before us! We never had any disturbances with the Indians below our northwestern frontiers; therefore, we had no use

8. O'Callaghan—Col. Hist. of N. Y., Vol. I, pp. 271, 292.
Coll. N. Y. Hist. Soc., N. S., Vol. I, p. 412.

Myers—Narr. of Early Penna., West N. J., & Del., p. 75.

9. Jameson—Narr. of New Netherland, p. 84, n. 3.

10. Van Rensselaer Bowier MSS., pp. 235, 244-248.

11. Coll. N. Y. Hist. Soc., N. S., Vol. I, p. 412.

O'Callaghan—Col. Hist. of N. Y., Vol. I, p. 292.

for the mythical fort which some persons would have us believe was erected in Trenton.

The octagon building was located 1305 feet in an air line from the spot where William Trent afterwards built his colonial home; and, it was, as Mr. Megill said and living witnesses know, about sixty feet in diameter. To remove any suspicion that this building was the kitchen or stables of William Trent I need only quote *The Pennsylvania Journal* for March 12, 1767, which shows that his kitchen was built of brick, 30 by 20 feet in size, two stories high, the upper floor having four apartments for the accommodation of his servants. The dimensions of his barn is given as 40 by 38 feet.¹² Therefore, both of these outbuildings were misfits and impossibilities to the foundation of the octagon walls.

Aside from the evidence presented to show that the Dutch West India Company established a trading-post in this city about 1630, of a design characteristic to the Dutch race, common sense instinctively prompts the mind to reason that these octagon walls were the remnants of that enterprise. The superstructure was evidently built of logs, otherwise the upper surface of the foundation excavated would not have been level and flush. The great fire-place in the basement not only served the cooking and kept the quarters warm in winter, but it enabled the traders to try out the fats and other oils obtained from the animals which they bartered from the Indians. The transverse walls were built to support the great weight of the skins, stores and other materials which were stored on the floor above. The four barricaded doors in the basement furnished convenient exits in the event of attack by the Indians, and, upon being opened in summer, provided proper ventilation to their quarters. The brick wall on the outside facing the river was doubtless built to divert the dampness and the cold northwest winds in winter from the crude walls of which the foundation was composed, and on which side of the basement the traders undoubtedly lived.

The Dutch records further show that their trading-posts were armed;¹³ consequently, it is not strange that a few

12. N. J. Arch., Vol. XXV, p. 314.

13. Van Rensselaer Bowier MSS., p. 245.

small cannon balls were found in the excavation; nor is it to be wondered that much broken crockery was unearthed, if the building was destroyed by the Swedish authorities by fire or otherwise.

It may be asked why the traders at Sanhican required such a large building to conduct their business. This may be answered by saying that the headquarters of the West India Company in America was located at New Amsterdam, now New York City. While the men here had access to headquarters overland by the Indian path, it was the custom of the Company to despatch small shallops from New Amsterdam to Sanhican every spring and fall of the year carrying provisions and clothing to the men and goods for barter with the Indians, and returning loaded with skins and other materials of trade. As a result, considerable storage space was necessary to administer these semi-annual operations.¹⁴

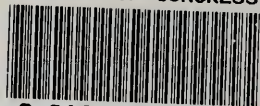
With the four openings in the walls, after the building was destroyed, it is obvious that heavy rains and melting snows would quickly carry great torrents of earth through these apertures, sufficient to obliterate the ruins from the sight of man within a comparatively short period.

The bulk of the manuscript records of the West India Company were junked in Holland about seventy-five years ago. Therefore, I claim that so much of the fragmentary records relating to the activities of this Company which have been preserved, together with the collateral circumstances I have enumerated—based conservatively on the rule of exclusion, abundantly proves beyond a question of doubt that the octagon walls unearthed here in 1872 were the remains of The Dutch Trading Post, upon which was erected the insignia designating that this locality was part of the New Netherlands and under the sovereign power of the States-General of Holland.

The discovery of these ruins marks the location of the most ancient historical landmark within this vicinity, or that which is known in any other part of the State of New Jersey, the existence and recollection of which should be forever preserved.

14. Van Rensselaer Bowier MSS., pp. 244-246.

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